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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR OES/ENV - HH FINMAN

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SUBJECT: MEXICO: MERCURY DEMARCHE

Ref: State 63943

¶1. On June 23 U.S. Embassy Mexico City ESTH counselor and science specialist met with Teresa Bandala, Director General of International Affairs, and Ives Gomez, Director of the Grey Agenda (Toxic Substance Office), in the Secretariat of Environment and Natural Resources (SEMARNAT). They noted that Mexico prefers voluntary actions aimed at effective solutions regarding mercury environmental problems rather than a legally-binding instrument. Bandala pointed out that any additional instrument (whether legally-binding or voluntary) would add more difficulties for achieving an integrated and efficient agenda in UNEP. Mexico prefers using existing voluntary instruments where additional resources could be applied to control mercury, rather than any fragmentary efforts involving new commitments and bureaucracy.

¶2. Gomez added that if another instrument is established for mercury and then expanded to include other metals such as lead and cadmium, the instrument would have to consider that the additional elements have different environmental behaviors than mercury. He went on to argue that voluntary instruments such as the Basil Convention, which already includes mercury, should be used to address mercury concerns instead. Gomez pointed out that Mexico also favors the inclusion of mercury in UNEP Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM) which could then be used as a mechanism to develop a long term-strategy. He did admit that a voluntary instrument lacks the teeth to control and decrease mercury pollution with enforcement authority.

¶3. Ives Gomez informed that Mexico has already been working on mercury under the framework of the trilateral Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC). Mexico's first task is to get an inventory of mercury, hopefully with the support of CEC and UNEP, then develop national regulations, although Gomez expects some difficulties with the mining and fishing industries.

¶4. ESTH reps asked SEMARNAT interlocutors if they thought a united trilateral position could be developed by the North American countries. Gomez commented that they had not yet discussed their ideas with Canada, but pointed out that northern countries have a different position, since they get more mercury pollution as the metal tends to migrate to the north. Gomez added that the GRULAC countries have diverse positions on mercury, but that Mexico and Argentina have similar approaches.

¶5. Comment: Mexico's "no new agreements" approach to mercury management may find many allies, especially among countries not already committed to the European approach. The USG may want to consider reviewing this alternate approach to a global voluntary mercury mechanism before the Ad-Hoc Open-Ended Working Group meeting in October. End comment.

GARZA